

**Joint Subcommittee to Study Strategies and Models for the Prevention and
Treatment of Substance Abuse (SJR 77)
MEETING 1 SUMMARY**

The first meeting of the Joint Subcommittee to Study Strategies and Models for the Prevention and Treatment of Substance Abuse was held on Thursday, July 31, 2008, at the General Assembly Building in Richmond. Upon a majority vote of the members present and voting, Senator Emmett W. Hanger, Jr. was elected chairman of the joint subcommittee. Delegate John O'Bannon, III was elected vice chairman.

Following opening remarks by the chairman and introduction of the members of the joint subcommittee, Ms. Nathalie Molliet-Ribet presented the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission's report, *Mitigating the Cost of Substance Abuse in the Commonwealth*. Ms. Molliet-Ribet stated that substance abuse costs the Commonwealth approximately \$613 million in 2006, with \$595 million, or 96% of the total cost, resulting from criminal justice-related expenditures, primarily the costs of housing offenders convicted of drug-related crimes. Ms. Molliet-Ribet noted that during the same period, state and local governments spent \$102 million to provide substance abuse treatment and prevention services. She stated that evidence conclusively shows that treatment works, and that the fiscal cost of substance abuse to the Commonwealth and localities can be reduced through treatment and prevention services. Concluding the presentation, Ms. Molliet-Ribet described a number of recommendations, drawn from the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission's report, for increasing the effectiveness of substance abuse treatment and prevention services and limiting the costs of substance abuse to the Commonwealth and local governments.

Mr. Raymond Ratke, Deputy Commissioner of the Department of Mental Health, Mental Retardation, and Substance Abuse Services, presented the Department's response to the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission report, highlighting efforts undertaken by the Department to comply with the recommendations contained in the report.

Dr. Mady Chalk discussed elements of successful and cost-effective substance abuse treatment programs, noting that substance abuse is a chronic disease that needs to be managed in a manner similar to management of other chronic diseases. Dr. Chalk reiterated the point made earlier that treatment works to limit the impact of substance abuse, and volunteered to provide information to the joint subcommittee on promising substance abuse treatment models in other states.

Dr. Joel Grube presented information on substance abuse prevention models specifically targeting adolescent and under-aged drinking. He highlighted programs which have proven to be successful in reducing substance abuse among these populations, including increasing alcohol taxes and graduating licensing.

Following presentations by Dr. Chalk and Dr. Grube, a group of speakers representing a coalition of interested stakeholders from the southwestern part of the Commonwealth addressed the joint subcommittee. Mr. Douglas Meade of Occupational Enterprises, Inc.

described the purpose of the coalition, highlighting the importance of communication and cooperation to achieving their goals. Mr. Meade characterized southwest Virginia as "under attack" by drugs. He stated that the coalition is working to inventory effective substance abuse programs.

Mr. Ron Allison, Executive Director of the Cumberland Mountain Community Services Board, expressed concerns regarding the effects of current low Medicaid reimbursement for drug abuse treatment. He explained that in southwest Virginia, the only consistently available treatment for person suffering from substance abuse problems is a five to seven day detoxification program which, absent sufficient support and follow-up services, accomplishes little. Mr. Allison noted a need for data sharing among the agencies and institutions providing treatment and for gender-specific treatment, particularly for pregnant women, and pointed out that prevention programs based on evidence-based practices are successful and should be incorporated into substance abuse treatment programs. Finally, Mr. Allison observed that, since the drugs most abused are legally acquired prescription drugs, area physicians need to develop pain management programs.

Mr. Tom Casteel, Director of the Washington County Department of Social Services and coalition member, described the effect of substance abuse on local social services departments, and explained that substance abuse has become the most common reason for a child to enter foster care in southwest Virginia, resulting in a substantial increase in foster care needs. Mr. Casteel also stated that cases of substance-exposed infants are rising steadily.

Mr. Dennis H. Lee, the Commonwealth's Attorney for Tazewell County, noted that the county crime rate tripled after the introduction of OxyContin to the region and that as much of as 90% of crime in the county was related to substance abuse. Mr. Lee stated that Tazewell County had built a new jail which, due to the sudden and massive increase in substance abuse-related crimes, was full beyond capacity at the time it opened. He said the county has a fledgling, nonstatutory drug court that has been successful in addressing substance abuse problems in the county, but that the drug court lacks sufficient funding and currently relies on community resources to function. Acknowledging that Tazewell has found some programs that work such as the drug court and day reporting centers, Mr. Lee stated that the programs are woefully underfunded and Tazewell is a community in crisis.

Mr. Bruce Kravitz of the Southwestern Virginia Alliance for Manufacturing spoke briefly about the need for skilled factory labor in the southwestern portion of the state and the difficulty in finding or keeping good employees. He said that many potential good workers either fail, or refuse to submit to, drug screening and that this has resulted in a difficulty in filling open positions.

Mr. Mark Larson of Occupational Enterprises, Inc. stressed the need for a "system of care" approach in treating substance abuse issues, and stated that the following are needed to create a successful program: drug courts, residential treatment centers, an integrated information system, and aftercare including provisions for jobs, housing,

daycare, and transportation. He noted that one dollar spent on substance abuse treatment could save four to seven dollars in other costs.

The final speaker of the meeting was Mr. John Shinholser, President of the McShin Foundation, a nonprofit substance abuse treatment facility in Richmond. Mr. Shinholser described the goals of the McShin Foundation and how the foundation works to achieve these goals. He stressed the importance of including persons who have been through the recovery process in substance abuse treatment programs. By way of conclusion, Mr. Shinholser emphasized the need to think clearly about substance abuse treatment and prevention programming, to ensure that the best and most effective programs are in place.